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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a study for determining the reading vocabularies of graduating seniors majoring in education. The vocabulary section of Form A of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test was administered to ninety-eight graduating seniors at a major Southwestern State university. An analysis of the data revealed that only the teachers of English as a group scored above the national median for college seniors. The median score for all other teaching classifications represented in this group ranged from the forty-first percentile for early childhood teachers down to the seventeenth percentile for physical education teachers. A further analysis of the data according to teaching level revealed that the elementary teacher trainees scored better as a group than did their colleagues in secondary education. Comparisons between elementary and secondary teachers in the fields of English, physical education, and history-social studies all favor the elementary teachers. (WR)

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THOSE WHO CAN (read), DO;

THOSE WHO CAN'T (read), TEACH!

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THOSE WHO CAN (read), DO;
THOSE WHO CAN'T (read), TEACH!

Those who can (read), do; those who can't (read), teach. In a recent study of reading vocabulary skills at a major Southwestern state university, the author discovered a shocking number of graduating teacher-trainees with vocabularies no better than those of average high school students. It was found that twenty-five percent of the ninety-eight graduating seniors were found to have reading vocabularies comparable to those of middle-ranking 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders.

The vocabulary section of Form A of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test was administered to all student teachers; the low scores obtained will be a matter of grave concern to the reader who believes that vocabulary is a reflection of reading and thinking ability. An analysis of the data shown in Table I will reveal that only the teachers of English as a group scored above the national median for college seniors. The median score for all other teaching classifications represented in this group ranged from the forty-first percentile for Early Childhood teachers down to the seventeenth percentile for Physical Education teachers.

According to the results of the study, it was not only the Physical Education teaching group which exhibited serious deficiencies in reading vocabulary skills. While forty percent of the P.E. teachers scored no higher than high school students on the vocabulary subtest, over a third of the Fine Arts and History-Social Studies groups also read at a level equal to high school students. Treating the teachers of English as a group, twenty-one percent obtained scores comparable to those of high school students.

Table 1
Median Scores by Teaching Specialty
(expressed in percentiles)

Sample Size	Teaching Specialty	Level	Median Score in Percentiles	Range of Scores	% Scoring Below Median of National Norms	% Scoring at High School Level
14	English	El & Sec.	73	2-99	21%	21%
12	Early Childhood	El.	41	7-90	75%	17%
13	Math-Phys Science	El. & Sec.	40	21-99	54%	0%
12	Special Ed.	El. & Sec.	38	4-86	58%	8%
25	History-Soc. Stud.	El. & Sec.	28	3-99	72%	32%
8	Fine Arts	Sec. only	18	2-84	63%	38%
20	Physical Ed.	El. & Sec.	17	2-78	80%	40%

A further analysis of the data, according to teaching level, reveals that the elementary teacher-trainees scored better as a group than their colleagues in secondary education. It is interesting to note in Table 2 that comparisons between elementary and secondary teachers in the fields of English, Physical Education, and History-Social Studies all favor the elementary teachers.

Table 2
Median Scores by Teaching Level
(expressed in percentiles)

Elementary English	75	Secondary English	69
Elementary Physical Ed.	46	Secondary Physical Ed.	17
Elementary History-SS	45	Secondary History-SS	17
Total Elementary Group	40	Total Secondary Group	34

These data will be disconcerting to many, but especially to the reader who has regarded vocabulary as a good predictor of academic success. According to the results of this study, the value of vocabulary scores for predictive purposes is questionable. It is pertinent to note that even those students with high school level vocabulary skills had successfully completed four years of college work, at least eighty percent of which was completed in colleges other than education.

Serious questions need to be raised in reaction to this study:

1. Should it be a matter of concern to anybody that over twenty-five percent of the graduating teacher-trainees possess reading vocabularies no better than those of high school students? Are these scores representative of the college of education at this university? Of colleges of education in this state? In the nation? How do these vocabulary scores compare with those which might be obtained by students from other disciplines at this university?

2. Is it necessary that a teacher be able to read better than a high school student? What is a functional literacy level for a teacher?

3. Is functional literacy for a history teacher the same as functional literacy for a physical education teacher? What if the physical education teacher also teaches history or some other academic discipline?

4. Should a level of functional literacy be established as a criterion for admission to a college of education? As a criterion for teacher certification?

5. What is the correlation between reading ability and teaching effectiveness? Is the master teacher a product of his professional education? Or is he, as so many claim, self-made, a product of individual initiative and independent learning? If the latter is the case, what reading skills are needed for the teacher to become a master teacher? Is the teacher with

poor reading skills able to use printed material in his efforts to become a master teacher?

6. Should all teachers, no matter what their teaching specialty, be expected to make a contribution to the literacy of all students? Will the teacher, who is himself a poor reader, be able to make such a contribution?

Educators seem to subscribe to the premise that almost anyone can become a master teacher, and perhaps this is so. However, one rarely, if ever, hears of studies in which the academic competence of the teacher is a factor, thus making the production of master teachers more a matter of chance than of design. Is it really true that those who can (read), do, while those who can't (read), teach? Isn't it time for the profession to engage in research which will focus on this and the previously posed questions? Unfortunately, it seems a safe bet that at least twenty-five newly graduated teachers will never read the answers!